

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

17 DECEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE'

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2019 consultation which asked citizens to share their views on a number of key budget proposals being considered over the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of the budget consultation activities, analysis and key findings.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priorities:-
 1. Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
 2. Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
 3. Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.
- 2.2 The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2019 consultation sought to obtain views on specific budget reduction proposals across Council directorates. The allocation of financial resources determines the Council's ability to meet its corporate objectives. As such the report links to all corporate priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 Following continuous reductions in funding from central government, all Councils across the country are continuing to change the way they work and the services they provide so that they can manage with less. Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has made reductions from its budget of £27.07

million over the last four years (2016-17 to 2019-20), with an expectation of significant further reductions required over the next four years.

- 3.2 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over an eight week period from 9 September 2019 to 3 November 2019. Respondents were asked to share their views on a range of budget proposals being considered between 2020-21 and 2023-24, including: proposed increases to council tax and considering cutbacks to services including street cleaning, CCTV, pest control, town centre events, adult learning, education support services, as well as closing one of its three community recycling centres.
- 3.3 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. This 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2019 consultation exercise has built on the knowledge gained from the previous consultations and further developed the consultation to include new ways for people to participate and engage with the Council. A wide variety of methods of communication were used including surveys, social media, community engagement stands, town and community council and community group meetings.
- 3.4 In addition, in order to gather the views of young people the consultation team attended an all-Bridgend head-teacher's event to promote the survey as well as asking individual schools to take part in interactive sessions in order to gather feedback. As a result, 1,218 young people in comprehensive schools across the county borough took part in clicker-pad sessions.
- 3.5 The budget consultation overview, document and different surveys were made available between 9 September 2019 and 3 November 2019. The surveys were available on the council's website while paper copies were also made available in community groups or engagement events, or sent directly to residents upon request.
- 3.6 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: citizens of Bridgend County Borough, comprehensive schools, BCBC cabinet members/councillors, local businesses, council staff, town and community councils, partner organisations, community and equality groups, local interest / community groups and local media.
- 3.7 Methods of engagement included a survey (available online and paper copies at all local libraries), community meetings/ engagement stands, elected member workshops, other meetings/networking events, social media debates and comments, and a dedicated Citizens' Panel survey (available online and paper copies). A bespoke survey was also designed for youth engagement and an accessible version of the survey was also available. Survey completions and/or comments were collated as part of the different events and meetings. Feedback to the consultation was also welcome via letter, email or telephone.
- 3.8 The consultation was supported by a full communications and promotional plan. The main activities included two media releases, a BCBC budget explainer video, various press release/editorials in the media, a social

media/web campaign, poster/sign campaign, direct marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, schools, youth council and internal communications for staff and elected members. Links were also made to the consultation through HALO, Awen and BAVO's communication outlets.

3.9 In addition to general social media content, 3 polls were created on Twitter which generated 497 votes to key questions within the budget consultation survey.

4. Current Situation / proposal

4.1 The attached consultation report (Appendix A) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.

4.2 Overall, the council has received 7,437 interactions during the consultation, covering survey completions, engagement event attendees and social media interactions. This is an increase of 2,149 (40.6%) on the 5,288 interactions from last year, of which 1,200 relates to an increase on social media comments.

4.3 The response rate, by method of interaction is set out below:

Interactions	Number
Survey completions	3,417
Events/meetings/workshops	1,987
Emails	9
Letters	0
Telephone calls	7
Webpage Feedback	8
Social Media comments	1,365
Social Media Q&A	147
Social Media Polls	497
Total interactions	7,437

- 3,417 responses to the surveys were received in total. This represents a 27% increase on last year's total of 2,677.
- Overall 1,987 people attended the various events, workshops and meetings – these figures include schools.
- A total of 2,009 interactions were received via social media. This includes 147 interactions from the live question and answer (Q&A) session, 1,365 social media comments and 497 social media poll votes.
- 24 comments were received by email, telephone and webpage feedback.

4.4 Headline figures and themes include:

Headlines from the Public Consultation	
Council Tax	
64% of respondents stated that they would be prepared to pay an additional 6.5% council tax (this was the lowest amount that could be chosen).	
83% of respondents were not willing to pay an additional 13.6% council tax in order to protect all services for 12 months.	
The proposals to make savings that were supported by respondents were:	
Close Community Recycling Centres for one day per week each (70%).	
The council is not best placed to provide pest control services (58%).	
Remove funding for town centre events (54%).	
Remove funding for all strategic events (40%) and remove funding for Elvis Festival (32%).	
Remove funding for Bridgend Business Forum (72%).	
Reduce the funding for Adult Community Learning to save £65k (58%).	
Support for a model of localised day services through the development of Community Hubs (69%).	
Remove escorts from school transport where there are less than eight pupils (56%).	
Delegate funding to primary schools for pupils with additional learning needs (57%).	
Move to less face to face interactions within the Customer Services Contact Centre within Civic Offices (70%).	
Move to an appointment based system in the Customer Services Contact Centre (59%).	
The proposals that were not supported by respondents were:	
Move to a reactive street cleaning service (63%).	
Removal of funding for CCTV (70%).	
Removal of funding for Pop-up Business School (58%).	
Reconfiguration of the homelessness service (54%).	
Delegation of money for cognition and learning services to schools (52%).	
Generating Income	
61% of respondents agreed that the council should consider commercial ventures to fund and protect front line services.	
60% of respondents stated that the council should consider the possibility of providing energy to its residents to generate income.	
Social Media Responses – most common comments:	
Theme	No.
Don't increase council tax by 13.6%	242
We pay more council tax yet receive less services	203
Cut council staff/wages/expenses/pensions	200
Requests for more information on annual accounts and budget reductions	116
Cut councillors/wages/expenses	99
Council should challenge central government funding cuts	88
Issues with recycling and waste service	73

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There are no proposed changes to the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 Budget reduction proposals pursued will be subject to the appropriate equality impact assessment prior to implementation.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of the Budget Consultation. Officers have considered the importance of balancing short-term needs in terms of meeting savings targets, while safeguarding the ability to meet longer-term objectives and maintain sustainable services, when proposals were devised. A full Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment will be completed for the final MTFS presented to Council in February 2020.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The consultation report seeks to inform and aid cabinet members' decisions on the future direction of the Council and how to meet the challenging budget constraints in the years ahead.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to note the outcome of the consultation with interested parties as detailed in the attached consultation report.

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Background documents: None